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STATE FOR NEA/ELA - IRWIN, NEA/ELA - LAWSON, NEA/PPD, R,  
INR/R/MR, INR-PARENT,  
NSC - ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Lebanon: Media Reaction - December 15, 2008

Atmospherics:

Several local issues preoccupied the press, particularly what was described as the "first collision" over the next parliamentary elections during the Council of Ministers meeting. Local issues, however, did not eclipse the "shoe-throwing" incident in Iraq. All newspapers highlighted the incident with many noting that "President Bush got what he deserved."

Selected Headlines

"A Double Shoe Strike Almost Hit Bush in the Face: This is the Farewell Kiss from the Iraqis Dog" Arab nationalist As-Safir

"A Flying Journalist's Shoe Surprises Bush in Baghdad and He Responds: This is the Price of Freedom" pan-Arab Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat

"An Iraqi Shells Bush with his Shoe" Centrist Al-Anwar

"The Farewell Kiss for Bush in Baghdad: A Shoe and an Insult" pro-opposition Al-Akhbar

Block Quotes:

"American Consensus over Lebanon!" an editorial by Sateh Noureddine in Arab nationalist As-Safir (12/15):

"Among all the speeches that were delivered on U.S.-Lebanese relations...the speech that was delivered by the advisor of the new Secretary of State, Martin Indyk, during the Lebanese-American conference that ...was held last Friday was the most important and the most accurate. Also, it was probably the closest to the position that the new American Administration will take on Lebanon. In all previous speeches...there were two contradictory expectations: the first expects the Obama Administration to keep Lebanon on its priority list...the second expects the Obama Administration to make a deal at Lebanon's expense. Ambassador Indyk, however, confirmed publicly and frankly that Lebanon is not important strategically for the United States ...He described the U.S. commitment to Lebanon following the Hariri assassination as 'ethical,' but (this commitment) does not remove fears of Lebanon turning into a failed state if the Lebanese do not take their destiny into their own hands, or allow Hezbollah to dominate the country as a result of the next elections. ...Indyk...also seemed to say clearly that if Lebanon does negotiate with Israel, it will become the sacrifice...Such a clear American threat confirms that Lebanon has no value in U.S. eyes unless it becomes involved in negotiations with Israel and reaches a peace treaty with it. ...Let us hope that all will realize that the dangers of not negotiating with Israel are much less than sitting with an Israeli negotiator, even if a Syrian negotiator attends."

"Lebanese Comics and Arab Miracles..." an editorial by Talal Salman in Arab nationalist As-Safir (12/15):

"...As for Iraq in which we witnessed a suitable farewell for the head of the American Administration that took a decision to occupy Iraq, ...the Iraqi journalist stopped President Bush from celebrating his victory. Bush's picture showing him ducking to avoid the shoe will be the best briefing for his term and his great achievements! This Iraqi journalist summarized the Iraqi people's position on the U.S. occupation. The Americans will stop for a very long time before this eternal picture which indicated the Iraqi's opinion of this security pact between their country and [Kz'z...There is nothing better than this Iraqi shoe for describing the Iraqi people's opinion of Bush's policies..."

Sison